

JOHN LA ROSE

JOHN LA ROSE

It is unlikely that the full debt that the Black Community in Britain [and therefore the whole society] owes to John La Rose will ever be recognised. This is because so much of what he has done and continues to do, is done without fanfare or provision for public acknowledgement.

I first came across him in the mid-sixties when each month at the meeting of the West Indian Standing Conference at the West Indian Students' Centre in Earls Court, he gave a review of contemporary struggles in various parts of the world. This was to enable members of the Conference to see the struggles of black people in Britain in the context of the movements for liberation, civil and human rights in Africa, Latin America and the USA especially. These expositions were always lucid, free of jargon, and non-patronising, yet John's own wide knowledge was clearly evident. I was greatly helped by them.

John is a thinking activist, and that rare person - a genuine intellectual with the common touch. He loves and values people. He brought the same calm authority to his chairmanship of the Institute of Race Relations, planning strategy, defining aims and policies, as he did to his work with the working West Indian men and women who were concerned about what was happening to their children in the Education System, and started the Supplementary School Movement.

And yet my most outstanding recollection of John is of the community meeting at the Pagnell St Centre in New Cross immediately following the fire in which thirteen black youngsters had died.

The hall was crowded; the community was angry and the mood was ugly. It was no mean task to keep the meeting orderly: to ensure protected space for the person who was numb with shock and spoke haltingly in a low voice, while eloquent anger waited impatiently to urge us all to action. John was the People's Choice to chair the meeting, and the dignified "Day of Action" in which some ten thousand people, mostly black, marched from New Cross to Hyde Park owed much to his commitment and inspiration.

His patient supportive service to the Community continues, not only through New Beacon books and the International Book Fair but to individuals great and small alike. There has been many a "great man" who was very keen on humanity but could not stand people!" Not so with John La Rose. John is very keen on humanity, AND he does love people! I

JOHN LA ROSE

hope that those who record the achievements of the Black Community in Britain will not be put off by his modesty, but accord him his proper place in such annals.

by

WILFRED WOOD [Rt Revd Dr]

Bishop of Croydon 28.1.91

to
dear friend
with great affection
"with love" /dmc

EVERCHANGING IMMANENCE OF CULTURE
by John La Rose

The famous Haitian writer, Jacques Stephen Alexis, elaborated and explored the idea that the world the writer and artist encountered was grounded in 'le realisme merveilleux'. His novels Compere General Soleil - Compadre General Sun, and Les Arbres Musiciens - The Musicians The Trees, and his life expressed that historic sensibility of resurrection and reconstruction from the de profundis of the inferno. An almost exact phrase was used by the distinguished Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in the introduction to his novel El Reino de Este Mundo - The Kingdom of This World when it was first published in Mexico, but that introduction was omitted from the better known edition published in France; and in its English translation. The term he used was 'lo real maravilloso'. Both terms were translated at the time as 'marvellous realism', a better interpretation of that insight than the cruder 'magical realism', much used since the advent of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel A Hundred Years of Solitude.

For some time now I have abandoned that interpretation, that of 'marvellous realism', for the more plastic expression: 'the marvels of reality'.

The marvels of the whole continental American experience, from Artic top to Antarctic toe, lie in what has been sculptured and moulded out of the mosaic and debris of history. Out of the fabled meeting of the people with the vagaries of life and experience, and the unending pilgrimage with fate. Unlike Fukuyama I think that history, the story, has no end and that man is lasting and enduring. Home, then, is a kind of solid moving foothold, in the imagination, in the dream, in the uneasy voyage of hope, in the uncertain complexity of fulfilment. There is no fixity nor can there be any.

There were voyages across the land, across the Behring Straits, into the construction and destruction of civilisations by Carib, by Maya, by Inca. And across the bitter sea, the 'dark water' as V.S. Naipaul's ancestor called it, by African, European, Asian into the maelstrom and meeting of peoples, cultures and continents. Visions of remembrance never cease to spring from interiors of the mind. As in the poem 'Behring Straits' by Wilson Harris:

The tremendous voyage between two worlds
is contained in every hollow shell, in every name that
echoes

a nameless bell,
in tree-trunk or cave
or sound: in drowned Asia's bones:
a log-book in the clouds
names the straits of eternity:

Or in the beautiful slowmoving melody of Jacques Roumain's 'The Long Road to Guinea':

¹Talk given at a 1992 ARIB Conference London March 27-28, 1992
entitled conference entitled: 'Dreaming the Homeland: African Writers in Exile'
Talk also published in the Journal 'Africa Events' 1992.

It's the long road to Guinea
Death takes you down
Here are the boughs, the trees, the forest.
Listen to the sound of the wind in its long hair
of eternal night.

And the poem ends:

It's the long road to Guinea...
Around the eye of the river
the eyelashes of the trees open in decaying light
There, there awaits you beside the water a quiet village
And the hut of your fathers, and the hard ancestral stone
where your head will rest at last.

The remembrance is bucolic; of the land and the village. That past still lingers into the present; into the here and now where epochs of civilisation meet.

But the dominating transition, over the centuries, has been from the village to the town, down the road to the megacity; from subsistence agriculture, communal song and dance, the body that sings - from there to surplus and surfeit; from the handloom, the hoe and manufactory to the disciplined metronome body in the machine industrial factory; from all that, to computerisation and globalisation. We the people of the world have been dragged from our moorings, moved around the planet to nodal points of production, fractured and reshaped. But we also reshape ourselves and intervene in pursuit of desire and need.

Whether induced into flight, by the death of hope, like migratory birds and made unwelcome where we alight; whether captured into slave production and concentration camps then whipped, mutilated, and murdered; in whatever way, we inhabit a world of the diaspora. The diaspora of the past, at certain points in history, the human story, is fixated in evergreen tablets of memory. Like Moses out of Egypt, like Africans dragged kicking, suicidal and screaming into a New World: the Americas. But diaspora is never ending; like the migration of Volga Germans and Tartars under the stern command of Stalin, the flight of Mexican hopefuls into the USA, or the arrival of guest workers and West Indians in Europe. In words from this poem of mine:

What we leave we carry
It is no mud we dry
On our boots.

At the moment of encounter with the other, we join the dance of
constant entanglement and change. The newcomer changes and the
society changes too.

Each culture claims its ancestry in the myth of beginnings, in the dreamtime of our imaginings and creation. But its specific particularity is expressed through language, and at times, through its human agglomeration as nation and state. However, each new invasion in the course of that history, each new domination imposes acculturation. Each new epic of resistance negotiates some kind of transculturation, which is a more equal

and acceptable form of interpenetration. The Roman legions conquered Gaul and initiated, with ancient Latin, the elaboration of the romance languages. Having won the battles for space, for freedom and independence, we are freer to remake ourselves.

While the umbilical cord to the past, its spirituality or its religiosity, its selfconsciousness of particularity or achievement is never severed and somehow resurfaces itself; language, expression, and feeling is modified. When Fanon wrote that our destiny was to be white he meant, quite simply, that human destiny was so interlinked we could not avoid being involved in the toils and trappings of modernity: with the train, the car, the bus, the lorry, helicopter and aeroplane; with the telephone and the satellite; with the factories, and modern agricultural machinery; with banks and financial institutions; with the newspaper and magazine, with radio, TV and video; with popular music, Hollywood and rap; with whatever is new and significant; and with the establishment of the most powerful regulator of us all: the modern state. These elements of material culture shape our lives and we insert our meanings and aspirations into them. We shake the tree to its roots and uproot it if we can, if in the pursuit of that aspiration, we add our stone and mortar, our ideas and innovations to the construction of a better world.

I wrote this poem in 1967 as a message for a conference on exile. The conference was held in Canada two and a half decades ago:

28 Prosepoem for a Conference
A people of exile, living in the permanence of tragedy and dispossessed hope. We are the wanderers and a wonder of this world. We have survived, deprived of pristine utterance, appropriating and welding language out of ancestral wounds and sacrifice. Wounds still fresh-cut work under my words. In the colloquy of everything, everything present lives with everything past in momentary and imperfect blindness. We are, such as we are, the living tissue of contemporaneity caught in islands, or thicker land masses, plying our own triangular trade in ourselves, exporting ourselves from hopelessness into hope, from disillusion into anaemic illusion; avoiding the pilgrimage of return into the dark unmentionable habitats that lie in ourselves;...and lived to fight. Such as we are, we are the salted embryo of a world whose fixities grow loose while ours, our world - once indecently naked and rootless - firm and gell for the encounter with history, ready. Fragments of roots - scorned in the night of self-contempt - spring to rebirth, the seed of renewal. Exile paid its premium in self awareness; we begin to know. A message of hope and contradiction, but such is my message.

(c) John La Rose, March 1992

*to dear Jim with best wishes ~ with constant hope.
John La Rose*

UNEMPLOYMENT, LEISURE AND THE BIRTH OF CREATIVITY

John La Rose

As the 20th century ends, the world we inhabit is living through tempestuous times. Old spectres of fascism and nazism, religious and ethnic conflict and terror haunt us, even in Europe, once again. In other continents the ravages of communalism and modern fundamentalisms, subsumed in the earlier visions of progressive national and social change, resurface in all their barbarism. The promise and struggles of the early postwar years, though producing major advances in most areas of the globe, now face new dilemmas.

The reordering of the world economy, now constantly taking place, on the basis of new technologies and the phenomenal increase in productivity which they have brought with them, present us with possibilities for "a shorter working day, a shorter working life, and more time for rest, recreation and cultural creativity" in whatever way this is accomplished and geared to the realities of particular economies and societies. We can have either that or the continual growth of an international crisis of the underclass, with its expectations and life experience, the descent into the drug economy with its various consequences; and the emergence of what has been called in Europe, especially during the recent French general elections, the world of "social exclusion".

With exclusion come stress, dislocation, anxiety. But the audit is not complete nor is it entirely negative. The perspective is

not totally grim. Out of the terror and dislocation of time without work, without visible income; out of the womb of originally unwelcome leisure also emerge prodigious marvels of creativity. And it is those who are closest in status and space to the art of the creators who become the initial consumers of their creative productions. And it is they who revel in the creative originalities and who provide the early source of endorsement and applause.

It is clear by now that none of the world's economies and societies can provide iron certainties on the basis of the current acceleration of computerised methods of production regulated by an outdated 8-hour working day, now well over a century old.

It is not as if the 8-hour day ever applied to all sections of society everywhere. It was certainly an aspiration and achievement for large sections of the population, especially those who were well organised in key areas of production in modern advanced industrial societies and for the more privileged and also the well-organised in less industrialised, colonial, dependent societies. Many hundreds of thousands working in colonial dependencies only worked for 7 hours a day, had one hour for lunch in a 5-day week; and also enjoyed public holidays and annual vacations with pay.

The experience of social exclusion is not particularly French. There are at least 18 million unemployed in the European Union. Kenneth Clarke, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, in a

recent interview announced publicly and without ambiguity: "I don't want to see the development of an underclass where part of the population is dispossessed, a part that regards itself as not belonging to the market economy and the aspirations and way of life of the rest." (Guardian, July 20, 1995). But however the manipulation of statistics or the conduct of social policy may disguise the realities, the promise of full employment on the basis of the 8-hour day is not available anymore. What we now have is the general contraction of the labour force as a proportion of the population.

The permanently or mostly unemployed and underemployed, the now designated underclass, has existed in their tens of millions - including within the USA and parts of Europe, East and West - for decades, for a long time. The constitutional guarantee of jobs in the former Soviet Union, accompanied by the formal abolition of unemployment in what Rudolf Bahro called regimes of "actually existing socialism", could not hide the underemployment and inefficiency of labour productivity. Perestroika or reconstruction became critically necessary because reforming leaders recognised that the economy and society could not proceed in the same way any more; and that they needed reconstruction on an entirely new basis for survival and development.

The current crisis at the heart of the modern industrial civilisation is like a cruel and unexpected irony. What was peripheral has now become central and lies at the core of the principal centres of production in the globalised world economy.

Earlier, systems of production required enormous investments of labour - from slave, serf or indentured labour - to maintain various levels of production. Each new advance from manufactory to the industrial mechanised factory, to its apex the fordist assembly line, and now to the modern computerised facility with robots, requires less and less investment of labour to produce more and more items of production.

The social solution lay in the shorter working day allowing more producers - workers and employees - to be employed on the basis of shorter working hours; and a shorter working life. As early as 1791, the Philadelphia carpenters went on strike for the 10-hour day. In 1844 the New England Workingmen's Association, who were mostly women textile workers in factories of New England and Pennsylvania, formed unions of factory workers and led the demand for the 10-hour day. By the 1860s there were many 8-hour day campaigning organisations in the USA. In 1864 the International Workingmen's Association made the 8-hour day an international banner for workingmen and workingwomen wherever they were. It was 8 hours for work, 8 hours for rest and recreation, 8 hours for sleep. By the 1880s, the 8-hour day had already been conceded and that has been the central experience for over a century. The modern mechanised factory needed mass education. We need to evaluate how this acquisition and accumulation of leisure time has impacted on our civilization. Mass media, mass popular culture, mass tourism and mass travel would not have been possible without it. A more profound analysis with wider interlocking elements can easily be made.

But for tens of millions of the world's people, especially during the period of colonialism in their histories, "social exclusion" from regular work and income has been a longterm and dire experience. Yet social exclusion was not social death; social exclusion, with its enforced leisure, produced forms of cultural creativity which engendered marvels of reality, "*le realisme merveilleux*", in Jacques Stephen Alexis's phrase or in the words of Alejo Carpentier: "*lo real maravilloso*".

Looking back at the agora in ancient Greece, we see the outlines of this process. The Greek *skole* or leisure, from which words like scholar and scholarship originate, allowed for time, for discussion, for debate and interaction, which underlined the development of philosophy, drama and democracy. It was the rigour of slave labour which made all this leisure possible.

In the Caribbean the unemployed, in their enforced leisure, created Calypso, the famous mass popular Carnival and Steelband. It was the unemployed from Behind the Bridge in Port of Spain, Trinidad, who created the language, the music, the dance, the instruments, the organisations, which gave birth and originality to these institutions. They were like any other artist - with time for withdrawal into intense moments of creativity, working for hours and hours at their artform and producing brilliant episodes of invention.

Each of these marvels of creativity also engenders extensive forms of productive activity: carnival bands, calypso tents, carnival tourists, more hotels, the invention and production of

unique instruments for a wholly new type of orchestra, work for tuners who tune them, compositions, studios, agents, concerts, exports, travels for orchestras, tours internally and abroad, arrangers, cassettes and CDs, programmes for the radio, TV, books, journals, the press. The list is much lengthier.

The same is true for the genius of the unemployed in Kingston, Jamaica, who, in their leisure created Rude Bwoy and Reggae, of whom the most famous exponent was Bob Marley. No one, in the original moment of creativity, would have dreamt of such marvellous creations, especially coming from such excluded sections of society, from Frantz Fanon's "Wretched of the Earth".

We have only to think of the massive popular creativity of African-Americans in their world of social exclusion and segregation: their negro spirituals, the black church with its sustaining spirituality, its inspired and influential musical forms, its foundations for oral expressiveness and invention, its inspiration for literature; and then blues, jazz and now rap, and the constant inventiveness in language, dance, music, art, style and fashion. This creativity, provides a praxis of transculturation, profound in its world impact and interaction among the peoples of our planet. But it was the unemployed underclass of New Orleans, in their leisure, who created jazz which then spread to the North of the USA and, like works of Stravinsky or Bernstein, then encountered the world beyond.

The reduction of working time, its leisure, its time for reflection and withdrawal into moments of creative expression is

the world of the artist, the world of cultural creativity. It is life without regimentation, the liberation of the metronome machine body into spontaneous expressiveness of the sinuous body that dances, and sings, released from automaton actions of factory discipline or not incorporated into it.

This account excludes other marvels of creativity, among large sections of other societies in all areas of the globe living through similar conditions and experiences, which the modern media, in its global reach and need for material, discovers and discloses. But this theoretical outline provides the framework for a different apprehension of social exclusion beyond the negative function of social death.

1 August 1995

© copyright John La Rose, 1995

John La Rose

2 Albert Road, Finsbury Park,

London N4 3RW, England

Tel: 0171-272 4889; fax: 0171-281 4662 (New Beacon Books)

written on commission for Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Switzerland

to
dear Jim
with best wishes to you all
for health and happiness
and
with undiminished confidence
and hope
19/11/2000

MARTIN CARTER 1927-1997
a personal memoir
by
John La Rose

The name Martin Carter came out of nowhere, out of the blue. In conversation. From the lips of Janet Jagan.

She came from Guyana, still then British Guiana, to visit us, to establish closer links between us. With us she was welcome; very welcome, but not at all welcome with the British colonial authorities, not with the Governor and not with Renison, then Colonial Secretary of Trinidad and Tobago. They banned her from the country and deported her back to Guyana. This ban in 1952 was the new beginning of the bans of pro-independence leaders from countries all over the region by the British colonial power.

We were the Workers Freedom Movement in process of becoming the West Indian Independence Party. All the key trade unions and their leaders adhered to the WIIP. The Oilfields Workers Trade Union, the Federated Workers Trade Union, the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Trade Union and their leaders took prominent roles in the party. John Rojas, President General of the OWTU, became Vice Chairman; Quintin O'Connor, General Secretary of the FWTU of the main lower paid government workers and general workers union, became Treasurer; Oli Mohamed, General Secretary of the ATSEFWTU of the sugar workers union, became an Executive member; Lennox Pierre, a leading progressive lawyer, poet and steelband expert and musical innovator, became Chairman; and I became the General Secretary, also having already been for some time member of the Executive (General Council) and Sub-Executive (Executive) of the FWTU. Like Lennox my interests and involvement were also with literature, kaiso (calypso), carnival, steelband, music, radio broadcasting, and study of language through current popular proverbs.

Our closest Caribbean relationship was with the PPP and our links grew closer over the years. The links extended beyond politics. Janet Jagan was the General Secretary and Martin Carter, a public cultural and social figure, was a member of the PPP executive. For us, especially for Lennox Pierre and myself and the many other serious cultural figures in our movement, *Kyk-over-al* from Guyana and *Bim* from Barbados were a continuation of the halcyon Beacon period with its short stories, music and social critique. The burgeoning of the early novels: *Minty Alley*, *Pitch Lake* and *Black Fauns*, John Jacob Thomas's *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* and *Froudacity*, Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*, James's *The Black Jacobins*, Arthur Lewis's *Labour in the West Indies* and our own study of folklore, language, kaiso, carnival and steelband laid foundations which inspired our outlook on the world.

Janet Jagan knew that we, I in particular, had already met and spent many long hours in discussion with Linden Burnham, another major leader of the PPP. Odo, as we also called him, had come to Trinidad for his marriage to Sheila Latasse an optician whose family was Trinidadian and lived in St Clair. He had made a good impression on us and we made plans for future interchange.

During her visit, we became aware, from information she provided, of the internal rivalries and leadership difficulties within the PPP. She spoke highly of Martin Carter and Sydney King, who later changed his name to Eusi Kwayana. Both were members of what she regarded as the progressive section of the PPP. In *Thunder*, the organ of the PPP, which we received as they were published, we avidly read articles by Martin Carter and Sydney King and discussed their range, erudition, and literary style, as well as their ideological, political and social direction. These were movements travelling in the same direction towards Federation, Independence and Socialism. They were not ideological monoliths. They were coalitions, confederations of various ideological, social and ethnic strands like all trade unions and popular movements.

What followed in later years, when the splits in the PPP occurred, possessed the novelistic quality of historical vagary, of epic effort and tragic journey as in CLR James's *The Black Jacobins*.

The first publication of Martin Carter's poetry, that we saw, was *The Hill of Fire Glows Red*, the small booklet in the series published by AJ Seymour, the poet and editor of *Kyk-over-al*. It confirmed for us the judgement that Janet Jagan had made of Martin Carter's work. Here was a special poetic voice which inflamed the burning angst that fed the fires of our passion for change.

The opening lines of the poem 'Do Not Stare At Me' read like thunder before the storm:

Do not stare at me from your window, lady
do not stare at me and wonder where I came from....

and as the poem unfolds:

Stare at the wagons of prisoners!
Stare at the hearse passing by your gate!
Stare at the slums in the south of the city!
Stare hard and reason, lady, where I came from
and where I go

His poem 'Looking At Your Hands' still moves me whenever I read it, even several decades later:

And so
if you see me
looking at your hands
listening when you speak
marching in your ranks
you must know
I do not sleep to dream, but dream to change the world.

The last stanza was like an anthem of our hope and aspiration for a world in postwar convulsion. In the dream, in the imagination is the beginning. We dreamt to change the world.

Martin Carter, and the rest of us, like our forerunners in Trinidad's Why Not and Beacon cultural movements, were voracious and voluminous readers, probing nuances and testing crosswinds in the urge to forge a new world from the phoenix of failure and folly, heroic striving and fragile success. Guyana in the 1950s was a crucible of change, challenging an oppressive BG, or as some called it, Bookers Guiana. And Martin Carter was at the centre of this maelstrom. It was his party, the PPP led by Cheddi Jagan and Linden Burnham, which spearheaded the mass challenge for progressive change. But that was only the prelude. The cacophony of sound and fury, stirring the country, signified everything.

The PPP won their stunning victory, winning 18 out of 24 seats in 1953 and upset the well laid plans to contain their challenge. After only '133 Days to Freedom' their government was forcibly overthrown with an invasion from the Black Watch Regiment. Prominent leaders were detained on what was called 'a concentration camp' on the Mazaruni River. Martin Carter was among the detained.

In the aftermath came dislocation and ethnic division, which disrupted the earlier vision of multicultural and multiethnic accommodation, economic progress and social justice.

Martin Carter's poetry collections: *The Hill Of Fire Glows Red* (1951), *The Kind Eagle* (1952), *Return* (1953) had established his status in Guyana. But it was *Poems of Resistance* (1954) which established his Caribbean and international reputation as a poet in the tradition of Walt Whitman, Pablo Neruda, Nicolas Guillen and Mayakovsky. All this enduring creativity seems to have emerged like a fullblown butterfly from a very special chrysalis: a literary and cultural matrix in tandem with Wilson Harris, the original imaginative thinker, poet, critic and novelist, and in the overarching presence of AJ Seymour poet and editor of *Kyk-over-al*.

I have a photograph of Wilson Harris from that period, concentrating intensely while reading from his first novel. He is sitting surrounded by equally intense listeners, all standing, who included Martin Carter, Ivan Van Sertima, Sydney Singh and Milton Williams. Some appeared to be looking at the writing on the page while he read in what appeared to be a moment of palpable excitement. They were inside the excitement and dilemma of the time.

I met Martin Carter in Trinidad in 1953. He, with two of his comrades, was on the way to a World Festival of Youth. Two of our delegates to the same festival joined them and they travelled away together. The day we met was like a congress into the night: laughter, discussion, information exchange and analysis, argument and challenge, the exuberant meeting of literary, political and philosophical minds. When they returned Martin Carter, Rory Westmaas and another comrade were banned from entering Trinidad. In spite of our legal challenge, they were all deported back to Guyana as Janet Jagan had been months before.

The overthrow of the PPP government aroused an explosion of instant solidarity: open air meetings, demonstrations, meetings in trade union halls, other confrontations. I read, we all read, from *Poems of Resistance* in open air meetings, in almost every solidarity event. Some lines possessed such beautiful resonance and power. The poems rallied audiences.

Is the university of hunger the wide waste.
is the pilgrimage of man the long march.
from the 'University of Hunger'

like:

I come from the niggeryard of yesterday
leaping from the oppressors hate
and the scorn of myself,
from 'I Come From The Nigger Yard'

The tragic mood and melancholy the dark foreboding of the moment were encapsulated for us in 'This Is The Dark Time My Love'. The opening stanza was like the perpetual anguish of a Goya painting from the Black Goya period, the period of resistance to the Napoleonic invasion:

This is the dark time, my love.
All around the land brown beetles crawl about.
The shining sun is hidden in the sky.
Red flowers bend their heads in awful sorrow.

His poems 'Letter 1', 'Letter 2' and 'Letter 3' were reminders⁴ the price of suffering and separation, the worth and integrity of defiance. In 'Death Of A Comrade' the opening salvo is a line stanza:

Death must not find us thinking that we die.

immediately followed by:

Too soon, too soon
our banner draped for you.
I would prefer
the banner in the wind.
Not bound so tightly
in a scarlet fold -

and as the mass march of mourners draws to its end:

Now from the vanguard moving on
dear Comrade I salute you and I say
Death will not find us thinking that we die.

But the poem we read most, which bound us together across the seas, that poem was 'I Clench My Fist'. The peroration, in the last stanza, spoke of an unalterable commitment:

Although you come in thousands from the sea
Although you walk like locusts in the street
Although you point your gun straight at my heart
I clench my fist above my head; I sing my song of FREEDOM.

We later sent a short story writer from our group, a teacher, to Guyana to find out how things were on the ground and with our comrades there. He came back with a revelation: Wilson Harris's *Eternity To Season*. We read the poem sequence in amazement and admiration at the beauty, texture, and breadth of the writing. From that moment we knew we were in the presence of a great writer. Years later in London, I persuaded Wilson Harris to reprint *Eternity to Season*. And New Beacon Books published the final revised version of *Eternity to Season*, together with its original text, after it had been out of print for 24 years.

But from then, from those times, never such bright morning again.

The pristine hope and assurance, now dented, slowly vanished. Absolute confidence in the future was replaced by growing racial distrust, recrimination and ideological dissatisfaction. Racial symbolisms, which had previously encouraged hope, were now undermined. The all-encompassing progressive future for all was severely punctured. The fault lines of racial rivalries and generally racial voting, exacerbated by determined foreign interventions against Cheddi Jagan's PPP, led, over time, to a deadly explosion of racial riots at the beginning of the 1960s.

I scarcely heard about Martin Carter in those years, only titbits of information from mutual friends. Then at the height of the gloom of racial violence came his haunting poems of 'Jail Me Quickly':

were some who ran one way.
were some who ran another way.
were some who did not run at all.
were some who will not run again.
And I was with them all
when the sun and streets exploded.

The inventive hiatus in the sentence construction, the heart tug of the words rang out like the opening bars of a funeral march. He was in the turmoil, an integral part of it.

I did not see Martin Carter for many years, not until I went to Guyana for the celebration of the Cooperative Socialist Republic in February 1970. Though I was invited together with Andrew Salkey and Sam Selvon to this celebration I decided I could not go but commissioned Andrew to write a diary which New Beacon would publish such as the *Havana Journal* which he had written about our visit to the Havana Cultural Congress in 1967-68. Eventually I went to Guyana because of a further invitation from Martin Carter himself. It came to me through the Guyana High Commissioner in London. Andrew Salkey's *Georgetown Journal* (1971) is a record of that event. My most distinct memory of Martin at that time was his always singing 'Where Are All The Flowers Gone'.

It was during the visit to Guyana that Martin Carter expressed his hope that New Beacon Books would publish a book of poems and I agreed. Eventually the poems for the book came by hand through Aubrey Williams. Martin's first choice of title for the book was *Poems 1970-1950* but, after sometime, he eventually changed the title to *Poems of Succession*. And that is how it was published in 1977.

The decision to hold the first Carifesta was taken while we were in Guyana, and soon after we returned Andrew Salkey and I met in London with Martin and AJ Seymour. They were on their way to a Unesco conference in Italy. We met at Andrew Salkey's home. We insisted once again, in keeping with the perspective we had embraced in the Caribbean Artists Movement, that the Carifesta should be truly Caribbean, not simply Englishspeaking Caribbean but must include Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Frenchspeaking and Dutchspeaking areas especially Martinique, Guadeloupe and Surinam. I had most connections and addresses and we provided them. Carifesta has been till now pan Caribbean.

Martin Carter and I scarcely saw each other after that, but I always heard about him from Aubrey Williams who paid frequent visits to Guyana. We often spoke about and the intriguing succession of

difficulty and transcendence in his life. Aubrey always seemed to have spent time with Martin whenever he visited Guyana.

I saw Martin Carter later while he was at Essex University and when he came to the conference of Caribbean writers at the Commonwealth Institute. We met at my home. The conversation and discussion was always wide ranging and personal. We had both lived voluminous lives. His last request to us, when we last met, was to obtain a book for him about the philosophy of Leibnitz and send it down to Guyana for him. We did.

In this personal and incomplete memoir I end with a quotation from the 'Poems of Shape and Motion' which I have always read whenever I have given small intimate readings of the poetry that most moved me from the work of Boris Pasternak, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, Nicolas Guillen, Rabindranath Tagore, Aime Cesaire, from my own work and from Martin Carter.

From 'Shape and Motion One':

I was wondering if I could shape this passion
just as I wanted in solid fire.

I was wondering if the strange combustion of my days
the tension of the world inside me
and the strength of my heart was enough.

and then the almost impossible:

I was wondering if I could make myself
nothing but fire, pure and incorruptible.

and pondering the agony and the angst:

I was wondering if the agony of the years
could be traced to the seed of an hour.
If the roots that spread out in the swamp
ran too deep for the issuing flower.

and as the wondering comes to its inevitable end:

I was wondering if I could find myself
all that I am in all I could be.
If all the population of stars
would be less than the things I could utter
And the challenge of space in my soul
be filled by the shape I become.

The year was only 1955. Almost at the beginning of his wandering and meandering

Rest in peace, dear Martin.

© copyright John La Rose, October 1998

to
Dear Jim
with admiration
for your work
and your commitment.
JL
19/11/2000

HONOURING GEORGE PADMORE

by John La Rose

Introducing the George Padmore Memorial Lecture given by Manning Marable at the Brunei Lecture Theatre, School of Oriental and African Studies, on 9 October 1998

"Camden honours itself by honouring the memory of George Padmore." Those were words I wrote and sent to Sandie Dunne of the Equalities Unit of the London Borough of Camden when she contacted me about Camden's Windrush Celebrations and their plans to honour the life and work of George Padmore.

I was born in Arima, a town in Trinidad, a few miles from where George Padmore and CLR James were born. I was born some three decades after their birth. In my growing up in that society they were both legendary figures.

CLR James, or Nello as we called him, also grew up with his family as a boy in that town of Arima. His father was then headmaster of the Arima Boys Government School and, even in my time, as I later grew up, there were some people who still called that school Mr James's school. And James and Padmore were boyhood friends and later became great comrades and collaborators.

That setting was in an island context which had already produced its own legendary figures. I mention only three.

This was a country where John Jacob Thomas, better known as JJ Thomas, born in the dying days of slavery had already founded the study of creole linguistics with his book *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* published in 1869. And later, in 1889, he also published his daring book which he called *Froudacity*, an answer to James Anthony Froude's travesty of the history and aspirations of the Caribbean people for greater freedom and autonomy. Froude was at that time an influential writer and historian in Britain and Oxford's regius professor of history.

Our publishing house, New Beacon, reprinted both books in 1969.

From Trinidad Acham Chen, a Chinese Trinidadian, went to China and there became Foreign Minister in Sun Yat Sen's reforming government, the first stage in China's formidable social revolution.

FEM Hosein became one of the first descendants of indentured immigrants from India, who went abroad to Oxford to study, trained as a lawyer and later became the distinguished Mayor of Arima and a playwright, who wrote a play called *Hyarima* about our Amerindian past and heritage. The Mayor in our system has executive powers.

All of them came from an island, Trinidad, with a radical tradition stamped by a population formed in the wake of the great French Revolution of 1789, which greatly influenced life in the Caribbean.

And, as West Indians, they were surrounded by a chain of islands of no less distinction. I highlight only two. St Lucia which latterly produced two Nobel Prize Winners - Derek

Walcott for Literature and Arthur Lewis for Economics. And then Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire both from the island of Martinique and both great beacons of our time.

There are so many others: the towering figures of Marcus Garvey, the writer VS Naipaul, the historian Eric Williams, Learie Constantine the great cricketer, Arthur Wint the great athlete, and Bob Marley the great singer and composer.

Out of the revolts, maroon wars, and blood-soaked struggles against slavery and colonialism, against racial arrogance and imperial domination; out of the general strikes and popular insurrections, especially those from 1935 to 1938; out of the birth of trade unions and mass organisations; out of the origins of autonomous cultural expressiveness there emerged, over a long historical period, a search to redress the past and produce original beacons towards a luminous future. Not just for the Caribbean but, from the basis of a long multiethnic, multicultural historical praxis, came an urge to project a sense of this destiny for all mankind.

When I asked CLR James to write the Introduction to *Froudacity*, which we in New Beacon Books republished in 1969, he said to me quite cryptically "They will discover where we and Fanon and Césaire come from."

The *we* he referred to were a line of original people destined to fructify the world with ideas, convictions, methodologies of social expression founded in an experience of original creations like Carnival, Steelband, Reggae, Chutney and Calypso, and who had produced an abundant body of distinguished economic, historical and creative writing and a range of all the arts. That *we* certainly included George Padmore.

George Padmore emerged on the world stage out of that history, which I have described, to play his role for political and social liberation for Asia, for Africa, for the Americas, including the Caribbean.

I sought to perpetuate the memory of George Padmore when I founded the George Padmore Supplementary School in 1969, the first of the black supplementary schools at the beginning of the Black Education Movement in Britain in the 1960s. Years later, as we intended from the beginning, after long and practical political, cultural and publishing activity, after years of national and international experience, writing and analysis, we established the George Padmore Institute as a library, archive, educational, research and policy planning institute.

Tonight as Chairman of the George Padmore Institute I have great pleasure in chairing this lecture organised in conjunction with the Equalities Unit of the London Borough of Camden and I welcome Manning Marable here on this special occasion to give the George Padmore Memorial Lecture on the subject of: *Black Liberation: the legacy of George Padmore*.

to
tear Tuv
recovering unusual moments
of obscure humanness + creativity
19/11/2020

Kamau Brathwaite

A Heartfelt Memoir

by

John La Rose

It was at the time that I was preparing to reprint John Jacob Thomas's *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (1869) and his *Froudacity* (1889) that I decided to contact Kamau. He was then Edward Brathwaite and we all called him Eddie. That was how his wife, Doris and friends then called him.

I thought he was in Barbados as his name appeared in *Bim*. I therefore knew him and his work through *Bim*. Making enquiries I discovered he was in London, at William Goodenough House where postgraduate and postdoctoral academics and researchers found accommodation.

In trying to come to grips with the complexity of Caribbean society, which we sought to transform, this political and cultural grouping in Trinidad, to which I belonged, had formed study groups where we studied, among others, one of the books of J.J. Thomas. Both of his main books were then out of print for generations. Getting hold of a copy of the Grammar, we had the complete text copied on a typewriter and used that for study. This book was popularly known in Trinidad, among aficionados, as the *Patois Grammar*. Among the other books we read and studied were Arthur Lewis's *Labour in the West Indies*, T.S. Simey's *Development and Welfare in the West Indies*, Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery* and CLR James's *The Black Jacobins* were also in the bundle, quite numerous to mention. We were dedicated to the study and transformation of Caribbean society: its history, its creative literature, its folklore, its music and song, its culture, its politics, its social life, its institutions and its economy.

I wanted Elsa Goveia, the great historian whose work I admired and who had taught Walter Rodney and Gordon Rohlehr, when they were both students at the University of the West Indies – UWI¹, I wanted her to write the introduction to *Froudacity* which was, for me, a seminal defence of the Caribbean's ever widening aspirations for progress at the end of the 19th century.

As an historian, then working in the Department of History at the University of the West Indies, I thought Kamau would know where Elsa Goveia was and how to find her. In fact he did, but as she was otherwise busy on research for a history series for UWI courses, she could not write the introduction as I requested. I then asked CLR James, who wrote a brilliant introduction and overview to *Froudacity*, which we at New Beacon published..

I telephoned Kamau's flat and we immediately agreed to meet. And that was the beginning of a close and lasting friendship.

The year was 1966. In August of that year I, as founder and Sarah White as co-founder, launched the New Beacon publishing house with the publication of my first book of poems *Foundations*. New Beacon was named after the 1930's *Beacon* journal in which

¹ UWI – University of the West Indies. One of its campuses is in Mona, Jamaica; the others are in St Augustine, Trinidad and in Cave Hill, Barbados. At the time they were students it was the University College of the West Indies as it was then an affiliate college of the University of London

Albert Gomes, Alfred Mendes and CLR James had played the major roles. And, as it happened, the first meeting of the Caribbean Artists Movement took place in Kamau's flat in William Goodenough House in December of that same year, 1966.

Kamau and I knew of each other indirectly. I had been noticing his work in Frank Collymore's journal *Bim*. I had sent the last poem in *Foundations*, a long poem called 'Song to an Imperishable Sunlight' to Norman Girvan then an academic economist at UWI Mona, Jamaica. I also sent it to John Maxwell then editor of *Public Opinion* for publication in the journal, founded and owned by O.T. Fairclough. John Maxwell had published it but, until I met Kamau, I did not know this. Norman told me he had shown it to his close friend George Beckford, and to some others. He had also shown it to Kamau.

When we met, Kamau wanted to know more about 'Song To An Imperishable Sunlight'. I told him that was the end, that it was a complete sequence, there was nothing else. He told me of his book *Rights of Passage*, which was soon to be published by Oxford University Press in London. We met on common ground. I had been thinking of how to bring the novelists, poets, literary critics, painters and sculptors together. He too already had ideas of this type of interconnection between artists, which could be formed in London. I had mentioned something of this to Wilson Harris, when we first met, at the home of a mutual Guyanese friend, in 1961. Wilson does not remember this. But Kamau and I agreed that he would contact Andrew Salkey who knew everybody and I would contact Wilson Harris and any others. That was the foundation of our triple alliance, Kamau, Andrew and I, and the building of CAM. Rather it was our quadruple alliance, including Doris, because she played such a pivotal role.

One night when we were meeting to discuss the future we were planning I was a few minutes late. As I entered his flat I heard a voice reading. It was a recording of Kamau's voice reading from his brilliant long poem *Rights of Passage*. Everybody was listening, like in a reverie.

Until that moment I had never heard a voice so beautifully modulated, reading poetry so movingly, with such transparent artistic vision and sincerity. I had known other readers and reciters of poetry but none with such an aesthetic sense and striving for perfection. Somehow I have a vague recollection of Orlando Patterson² speaking in Kamau's flat about the admiration for Kamau on the Mona campus for his reading of poetry. I immediately proposed to Kamau that day that Sarah and I and New Beacon would produce a reading of the whole of his *Rights*. I was so moved. I felt confident that he would do it beautifully and would hold the audience with the internal drama, rhythm and music of the poem.

We, Sarah and I, had been attending all the plays at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre which Jim Haynes was then producing there, and we knew him otherwise. He had been innovating in Edinburgh with his paperback bookshop and with his Traverse Theatre which became part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. He produced only plays by living contemporary playwrights and it was there at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre, with Jim Haynes's cooperation, that New Beacon produced Kamau's reading of *Rights of Passage*.

CAM was about to launch its regular monthly sessions and its members were highly stimulated and in a state of general intellectual excitement and they all helped to advertise

² Lecturer then at the London School of Economics: one of his books was his doctoral thesis *Sociology of Slavery* and his novels were *The Children of Sisyphus* and *An Absence of Ruins*

the event. New Beacon invited all the connections we had including Douglas Cleverdon who had produced the BBC radio performance of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*. We had a distinguished audience of writers, artists and critics from the Caribbean and from Britain. And I produced the dramatised reading and performance. Kamau and Dermot Hussey also contributed suggestions to the production. There was a changing of positions on stage for different sections of *Rights* and pinpoint lighting of Kamau as he moved into different positions on stage. The whole event was a great success and discussion and comment, about what Kamau had achieved at this reading, rumbled on into the public sessions of CAM when they began soon after.

The programme leaflet for the *Rights of Passage* reading and performance also announced the launch of public sessions of CAM at the West Indian Students Centre in London for just a week later. At the centre of all this were Eddie and Doris. They, Eddie and Doris, were like an undifferentiated, unbreakable word. Both played a pivotal role. And this was the beginning of Kamau's continuing influence on Caribbean poetry and letters as critic, historian, as poet.

This was a time of coincidence. New novels were being published and discussed at CAM sessions. The work of painters and sculptors were being displayed at art exhibitions. CAM sessions were full. Audiences included people of distinction. It was a kind of agora, a time of renaissance. The news of what was happening in London spread far and wide. The students at the Centre were energised into work with supplementary schools and public drama performances of plays like Ed Bullins's *Electronic Nigger* and the dramatisation of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. Caribbeans in Britain were being influenced by the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements swirling around them. They were continuing in the direction that Caribbean organisations in Britain had initiated after the Notting Hill Riots of 1958. Education was of paramount concern. And we were in the anteroom of the Black Education Movement including the formation of CECWA³ and the Supplementary School Movement.

Kamau was concerned to know and observe all this resurgence in which Andrew and I were involved, I more than Andrew.

The first and second CAM conferences were held in 1967 and 1968 at the University of Kent at Canterbury. Louis James, one of our founders, taught there and facilitated arrangements. Kamau had urged New Beacon to set up a special bookselling event at the conference and we did so. It was also our first sortie into general bookselling and our first issue of a trilingual booklist in the main languages of the Caribbean: English, French and Spanish. The experience was invaluable for us and the conference participants. There was such a hunger for the books we had collected for the occasion. I was persuaded to open up late that night after the last creative session. The room was packed and I was there until about 2.00am. Kamau was happy and satisfied. It was his inspired suggestion. As we continued later on with book displays at CAM sessions and at other meetings, big and small, and at conferences, the hunger was the same. London and Britain was cauldron of challenge and change.

In one of the creative sessions of the CAM conferences I read from a bilingual edition of Aime Cesaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* published by Presence Africaine and from Hampate Ba's account of a creation myth taken from the proceedings of one of the conferences of Negro Writers and Artists organised by Presence. After that session Kamau was so enthused. Until then I did not know that we shared a passion for Aime Cesaire's

³ Caribbean Education and Community Workers Association

work, especially for his *Cahier*. In a conversational aside amid banter he said: “I sleep with that book under my pillow”.

Eddie and Doris again played central roles. But I knew that all intellectual, artistic and cultural movements like the *Beacon*, like *New World*, like CAM, like Surrealism eventually run their course; they leave their indelible mark on the artists and on the society, and having ingested and absorbed the experience the artists move on to new moments of intense creativity. CAM could not be replicated in the Caribbean or anywhere else. It was *sui generis* in place and time. Kamau had hoped for more but his immense creativity and originality now had a wider international reach.

This was also a time when Kamau was hard at work on his doctoral thesis at the University of Sussex supervised by the inestimable Donald Wood. When we read the thesis⁴ we offered to publish a small section of it under the title *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica*, and he agreed. Kamau had left his PhD for later, when it mattered to him, just like Susan Craig another island scholarship winner also did; she an Island Scholar from Trinidad and Tobago, he an Island Scholar from Barbados.

It was during this time I discovered how lavishly he spent each week on jazz and other music records. In passing conversation, he mentioned how much he spent and I was amazed. But I shouldn’t have been. The music and rhythm was embedded inside the heart of his poetry. And when he read it, he often drummed the rhythm with his fingers on any available spot or on the book and sometimes in the air like a conductor. He was a different drummer, with the mellifluous voice, a Haitian houngan as he imagined. He was a ‘marvel of reality’ in the tradition of Alejo Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravilloso’ and Jacques Stephen Alexis’s ‘le réalisme merveilleux’.

Kamau would have liked New Beacon to publish more of his marvellous, voluminous literary oeuvre but we at New Beacon had decided to remain small to medium publishers and to expand our cultural activity in other directions with, for example, the International Book Fair or Radical Black and Third World Books and its accompanying Book Fair Festival, which we co-founded in 1982. Though we admired his genius and his fertile continuous innovation over the years we were like Leonard and Virginia Woolf with their Hogarth Press. Our work would be significant, influential and circumscribed. Others would be inspired to take up the baton.

Kamau had travelled far, from the Roundhouse and the sea, through thickets of jazz and cricket, thence to Cambridge, the university, another Englishness indifferent to national pluralisms and emerging ethnicities, a variable Europe; from there to Ghana and the interior of Africanity and back; back to the Caribbean, ex Africa, X-self, back into the literature and wandering of history, of stories where it began, for him, for Derek Walcott, for Wilson Harris, for our Selves.

We met in midlife in London, each with years and volumes of experience. The visit I paid to his home, in the Roundhouse, was memorable insight and seeing. He was in his kumbla, in the midst of mother, father and aunt. We drove through Bridgetown visiting friends, reminiscing amid relics of his inheritance, the thread between his present and past. The house in Bay Street, opposite to the Roman Catholic Cathedral was now a little distant from the sea but in his time of childsplay the water almost lapped outside the house.

⁴ *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, Oxford University Press 1971

I was at Shop Hill years later and he at Dover Beach. We met in front of the conference centre on the sand and in the sea. He swam with the pleasure of a watersprite, returned to the Maresol to continue with his composition of *Sun Poem* while we vanished back into the beauty of Barbados.

As ‘Pathfinder’⁵, in Gordon Rohlehr’s phrase, Kamau had journeyed through the slings and arrows of outrageous criticism, not in silence, but with counterattack, creative self-affirmation and expansion of vision. I admired the resilience of his spirit. The great moment arrived, as it often does in the history of societies, unexpectedly. E.M Roach, the gifted and largely ignored Caribbean poet, wrote witheringly in *The Trinidad Guardian* about *Savacou 3/4*, the Special Issue dated December 1970/March 1971 and devoted to ‘New Writing 1970’. It had been edited by Kamau. Gordon Rohlehr wrote a devastating piece in reply. That was a landmark.

Kamau had clarionned the call in his introduction to the issue. He used another neologism from his armoury of neologisms: ‘Foreward*’. The asterisk was his and at the bottom of the same page he wrote “*sic”:

“At a time when the region is engaged in a serious, necessarily revolutionary questioning of West Indian values and their political, social and economic implications, it is very heartening to find that the imaginative literature of the region... reflects this crisis and indeed is often pragmatically involved in the debate. The way in which the number took shape is evidence of this inescapable fact, and the result is that although it was not put together according to any thematic masterplan, it demands, we think, to be read as a whole and single testimony.

“These words, written by Arthur Drayton for the special West Indian number of *The Literary Half-Yearly* (Mysore, India, 1970) which he guest edited, could apply with aptest justness to this first New Writing issue from *Savacou*.⁶”

CAM from its foundation in 1966 and Kamau and Gordon had consolidated the intellectual and artistic thrust of a new cultural paradigm in the lands and waters of the Caribbean and beyond. The debate and public fracas which occurred on the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies during the Commonwealth Literature Conference, in which VS Naipaul and others including Kamau were involved, was the tailend of a hurricane, blowing through Caribbean literature and society, which had not yet died down. Andrew Salkey and I quite deliberately did not attend and were later reproached for not taking our responsibilities seriously.

Whenever, over the years, Kamau visited London and stayed with us it was like family reunion and renewal; the toing and froing of friend and phonecall, laughing and talking, wideranging information and analysis, perceptive discourse, serious conversation and ole talk.

It was during one of my many visits to the Caribbean that Sarah telephoned me with urgent news. Doris was dying of cancer. I wanted to know what kind of cancer, and if Sarah could contact any of our friends or contacts in cancer research and see if they could

⁵ Gordon Rohlehr: *Pathfinder: Black Awakening In The Arrivants* of Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 1981, published by Gordon Rohlehr, 47 Glenside Gardens, Upper Tunapuna Road, Tunapuna, Trinidad. In his foreword to this book Gordon Rohlehr wrote: “Pathfinder seeks to explore the various processes whereby Brathwaite has invested the word with dimension and density, on his journey from *Rights of Passage* through *Masks to Islands*. This study places focus on the background and the contexts out of which the poetry took shape, and on the actual process of shaping.”

⁶ *Savacou* was, to quote its own statement, “A Journal Of The Caribbean Artists Movement”. It was started when Kamau left London and returned to the Caribbean. He was its main inspiration.

find out the state of current research and possibility of early breakthrough. I decided to cancel my travel plans and headed immediately for Jamaica. I could imagine the inexpressible turmoil that Kamau would be in and his need for unconditional help and support from friends and family. His sister Mary was there and close. Doris, smiling, loving and understanding, had given her all to Kamau. Whenever he expressed his irritations or larger annoyances or hurt she always soothed him. I sometimes heard her say: "but Eddie" to smooth him.

I got there after he knew the end was nearing. I stayed with them in Irish Town. While there, Kamau and I learned from Sarah in London that there would be no breakthrough for that kind of cancer in the near future. Possibly in a couple of years, the researchers said. Kamau was devastated. I had wanted to see lovely Doris, to be with her, to be with them. She was the same beautiful, sensitive, thoughtful woman and companion to Kamau as I had always known her.

Doris was loved in the village and anxious about what would happen to Kamau. I had seen this concern and anguish before, with another husband and another wife, when Sarah's mother was dying of cancer. Doris died not long after.

Kamau's *The Zea Mexican Diary 7 Sept 1926 – 7 Sept 1986*⁷ is one of the most moving and haunting testaments to love and parting. It is a great and enduring prosepoem.

This was Kamau's greatest time of turmoil and distress. He hit out in all directions. But as Thucydides wrote: "Time softens grief". Time and the gift of creative genius with which Kamau is blessed.

I stayed with Kamau in his New York flat close to NYU, New York University, after participating in a conference at MIT in the mid 1990s. He devoted himself to his work as if driven, writing and innovating on his computer late into the night and almost as soon as he rose early in the morning. I had to remind myself of his absorbing interest in and use of the latest and most up-to-date electronic equipment ever since we first met in 1966. His fertile artistic creativity was bolstered by the almost inexhaustible computerised devices. He played around as he explored its capacity for shape and aesthetic as he composed and recomposed anew.

We met again in the quiet of Barbados with Beverley and on Dover Beach again.

"Ever seen
a man
travel more
seen more
lands..."⁸

seen more love, seen more loss, seen more admiration and devotion, seen more in and into the world, seen and endured so much.

Peace and Love at 70.

©John La Rose, 18 March 2000
All rights reserved

⁷ 1993, University of Wisconsin Press

⁸ Edward Brathwaite: *Rights of Passage*, 1967, Oxford University Press, p.33



JOHN LA ROSE

Political and cultural activist, poet, essayist, publisher

*Presented by friends and comrades across five continents on the
occasion of his 75th birthday, 27 December 2002*

Sculptor: Errol Lloyd

John La Rose:

Co-founder of the Workers Freedom Movement in Trinidad & Tobago in the 1940s,
General Secretary of the West Indian Independence Party and European Representative of
the Oilfield Workers Trade Union.

Founder and Director of New Beacon Books — Britain's first black publishers and
booksellers (1966–), Director of The International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third
World Books (1982–1995), Chairman of the George Padmore Institute (1991–).

Photograph: Ahmet Francis Tel, 020 8968 7069